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Letter from B. H. Latisbe to Floride Clemson, 1863 January 23

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Dear Miss Howells
 Your permission - may your request - would
 warrant me in dropping the "Miss." but altho
 an elderly gentleman in addressing a young
 lady may with propriety omit some of the
 forms which etiquette requires of a younger
 man, and especially if he has the consent of the
 lady so to do. I hesitate to avail myself of
 the kindly allowed liberty - Nor can I tell you
 the reason of my hesitation more plainly than
 this - that if I had left out the "Miss" I should
 have felt also obliged to have discarded the
 "dear" as almost too familiar, and bespeaking
 a longer acquaintance than that which I
 have recently been so happy as to have formed
 with you - Besides what is Mr. Latrobe say,
 "this" not by any means an over-jealous wife?
 But pardon me, I had no idea of wanting
 a page in this way upon words - and will
 make at once the best amends I can by replying
 to your very kind note of the 12th which I

received on my return home a few days
ago which I have been sooner answered
but for many engagements, some of them vexatious
enough, which I found awaiting me here.
The interest which you have shown in the
two little compositions which it gave me
so much pleasure to give you to read, has
gratified me more than I can well express.
The one of them ⁱⁿ which my father's hand is
seen is indeed a very spirited & pleasing tale.
It is but a translation it is true, but a very happy
one I think, & the ^{few} verses are beautifully rendered.
The burial of the Knight Templar is really a
sublime scene & its ^{awful} solemnities are very skill-
fully interwoven with the ^{unhappy} incidents which excited
the ~~terror~~ of the reader while he was perusing
the story in the chamber of the castle. My father
was a man of ^{true} genius & of varied accomplishments.
He could have written as good a tale himself,
and the few shreds of his manuscript which fell
upon my humble self, ^{will} account to you for
my being able to produce even so merely pas-
sable a thing as the youthful attempt of

fictitious construction, ~~to~~^{to} which you are
so kind as to devote some lines of indulgent
criticism. I was but 23, when, to beguile
some hours of unrelieved feeling attendant upon
the change I was meditating in my profession
at that time I employed my pen as you see.
I think, perhaps, I told you the circumstances,
how my brother came to be the judge & on
whom the award of the prize was devolved & how,
for the reason I mentioned (his aversion to see
me wasting my time in such efforts) very
reluctantly gave it to me (not the prize for I
never got a glimpse of that but the preference
over my competitors - for it -)

I cannot help promising myself the pleasure
of peeping in upon you at the "glorious home"
as you (I fear too truly) call it. Happily some
of the bravest men in encounters with their
fellow mortals, have shown themselves the
veriest cowards in those with beings of the other
world, or I should be ashamed to own that
I would not care to keep a midnight vigil in
that haunted Chamber I cannot call it as it

happens to be the "best" I believe.
 But rather than miss another pleasant
 meeting with you dear (Miss) Florida I
 would agree to be your guest even for a
 night - altho' you were to lodge me in the
 very next room to that unquiet apartment
 hoping that the noise in my own (haunted)
 head would drown the racket among the
 chairs & tables. I must seriously however
 try to pay a visit some of these days to
 your residence and then I shall enjoy
 not only the ^{great} pleasure of seeing you again
 but the honor of an introduction to a lady
 whom I should be so glad to know as
 whose health is, I sincerely trust, quite restored.
 Your mother I hope will have not incurred
 her displeasure by introducing you to my
 favorite author Madame - more of whose
 beautiful and wonderful writing I should
 love to read to you with those earnest eyes
 fixed upon me as before. Never had I a rich
 treat than that hour in the study with such
 an address and pleasure in a favorite book is
 multiplied a hundred fold.

You seem, my dear young friend, to feel "crushed"
 - limited by my notice of you. Be assured that I feel
 quite as much flattered as yourself for how few young
 ladies are willing to listen to or look at a manuscript
 the mere mention of life & who has not even the merit
 (such as it is) of being a "rich girl". My daughter & Mrs.
 L. desire to be most kindly remembered to you. Mary is an-
 ticipating the coming letter. We have 3 young
 ladies here from Camden N. J. They are sweet girls, but
 to none of them I venture to read a chapter of Madame - to